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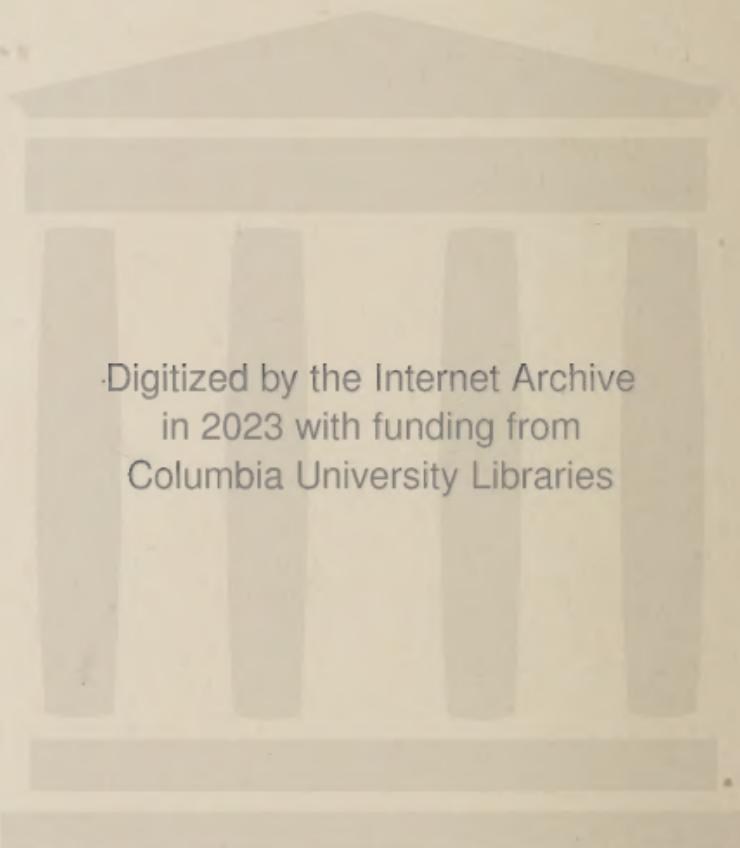
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# First Impressions of India



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WOMEN'S GENERAL MISSIONARY SOCIETY OF THE  
UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH



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## First Impressions of India.

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The new missionary has received her appointment from the board, the home good-byes are said, and the journey to India begun. You know what the journey by rail to New York City would be. Then it might be with you, as with me, your first sight of the ocean and an ocean steamer. I think I can see that great ship yet as she waited to take us across the Atlantic. I can hear the bell ring as the gangway was lifted, and our boat started down the harbor of New York; perhaps the most beautiful in all the world.

The new missionary never thinks, "Will I come back again?" She is always thinking of the first furlough and planning with friends what she will do when she comes home again. The returning missionary has other thoughts. She is nearly ten years older when the second journey to India is begun, and if father and mother have been spared they are ten years older, too. The next eight years will bring more changes into their lives and hers. So she questions, "Will I come back again?" "Will I see father and mother here again?"

Among those gathered at the pier to bid us good-bye was Dr. W. W. Barr, of the Foreign Board. He loved us as his daughters. We loved him as a father. He tied his handkerchief to his umbrella and the last one we could distinguish on the pier as we sailed away was Dr. Barr. When we came back there was no dear old Dr. Barr to greet us. He had gone home, and there he waits to welcome us as we join him, one by one.

Out we sailed, out past the Goddess of Liberty, out past Sandy Hook, out of sight of the dear home land, and thoughts crowd thick and fast. But not many miles from Sandy Hook and we were seasick and all thoughts forsook us. We felt like the old man who said he "Wasn't afraid he would die, but was afraid he wouldn't die!" The new missionary who is seasick is glad she will have seven years to get her courage to cross the Atlantic again.

Ten days passed by and the ship brought us to Glasgow, Scotland; some had a day to spend in Edinborough, and then we were off by rail to One week from Liverpool and we came to Liverpool, and then by another boat to India. Now we began to realize how big this world is. Gibraltar, Spain, with her millions of people on one side and the shores of Africa, with her millions on the other. Another week to Port Said, Egypt. Here the Egyptian party left us for Cairo. On through the Suez Canal and the Red Sea and six weeks from the day we left New York we landed in Bombay. A new country, new sights, new sounds and new smells greeted us everywhere. A journey of thirteen hundred miles by railroad brought us to the Punjab, our United Presbyterian mission field.

The flat, boundless plain stretches on every side, but one misses the hills, green grass, wild flowers and singing bird of America. To the north and just at the horizon the everlasting snows of the Himalayas are seen. One thinks that the difference in foliage, the crops in the fields and other things would first attract attention, but suddenly the newcomer finds that it is not the plains, the snow-capped mountains, nor the fields of wheat, rice and mustard, but the *people*. *People, people everywhere.* The question is where they are going and whence they come.

One enters a new and strange world, filled with vivid colors and fantastic costumes. The amount of bare skin visible, both masculine and feminine, startles one. A new missionary once said that during her first drive in the country she was so ashamed she could not lift her eyes. Not that everyone is thus scantily dressed. One gradually wakes up to the fact that some people have clothes on. Almost every conceivable costume is seen, the European suit, the white, flowing robes of the high caste Hindu, with his turban containing from ten to twenty yards of cloth, the closer fitting clothes of the Mohammedan, with his red fez. The amount of silver and tinsel jewelry worn by the working woman is remarkable. As described in poetry, "They wear rings in their noses, and rings on their toeses." They have bracelets, armlets, anklets, necklaces, ear-rings, toe-rings, finger rings, nose rings and infinitum. One of the first questions asked is, "How can a woman eat or drink with that huge pendant hanging from her nose, or sleep with that pile of rings in her ears?" and you may live in India seven years and be a "returned missionary" and still not know!

The gay colors immediately claim the attention. They make the street look like an animated rainbow. Orange, scarlet and green predominate, but yellow, pink, purple, blue and every tint and hue ever invented are seen. Several colors may be found in one costume, all contrasting with the sleek, brown skin of the wearer.

Every imaginable kind of conveyance may be seen. The two-wheeled, springless cart known as an ekka, drawn by one horse; a lower two-wheeled cart drawn by oxen or by an ox and a man, donkeys, camels, goats, buffalos and pariah dogs complete the list.

India is a land of living things. There is life all about us. Even in our houses the little lizards

play on the walls, the sparrows build their nests in the veranda. We have a continual conflict with white ants for our carpets, pictures and books, and a hand-to-hand fight with mosquitoes and sand flies for the possession of our own skins. Heads, beds and bodies become places of habitation for "living things" in India.

The first year is spent in the home of an older missionary in the study of the language. The Hindustani or Urdu comes first. The word Urdu itself means mixture, and we find in the language words from Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit and Hindi languages. How well I remember my little Hindustani primer! It was an inoffensive little book of about 18 pages, yet it gives the new missionary some trouble to get through it. It is the other side of the world in India and that may be the reason many things are opposite. We read our books from the back to the front and from right to left. We turn to the left in driving, milk our cows on the left side, begin at the top of a well to build a wall; men take off their shoes instead of their hats in entering a house; women's voices are lower than men's.

There are thirty-six letters in the alphabet. One cannot say them correctly the first time. There are two t's and two d's and two r's. I don't know why unless it is to give a new missionary trouble. I had to say the hard r over and over again. One of the missionaries suggested that my tongue was too long. But if the tongue is too long it must shorten and too short it must lengthen, and so the new missionary works and practices and prays, and prays and practices and works until some day, if patient and persistent, the reward comes. It will not come the first year. It may not the second. It may even be the third or fourth, but patient, hard effort brings it. Some day out in the village sitting on a bedstead, surrounded with a crowd of village women and children, you read to

them the old, old story and teach them His love for even Punjabi women. It's a new, strange message you bring, that women have souls and may enter heaven. At the close an old woman comes close and throwing her arms about you, says: "Kaisi sojni boli!" (What fine language.) She has understood you, liked your pronunciation, your accent and your message.

The first year is a long, hard year. We go out with the enthusiasm of the young taking up the life work. We have been active at home. We see our missionary friends in the work carrying burdens far beyond their strength, growing old with the cares of the work, and we long to be of use. But we must learn to speak the language, and while we wait many valuable lessons come to us.

We see, for the first time, heathenism. We thought we knew all about it. We have studied and read of the religions, we have looked at pictures of idols, but until we see one of those hideous creatures in a temple and men and women bowing down before it, we cannot realize what it means to be a heathen, to live in a heathen country and in a heathen atmosphere.

One learns by experience and observation. The evil faces of the men, the hopeless faces of the women, the dwarfed, dulled lives of the children, make one long to be able to speak the message of love, of peace, and of hope. Then, too, into the life of every new missionary comes the long, homesick hours in that first year, so far from home. Every new missionary has her trysting place with God. It may be down in the garden under some tree, or up on the roof under the starlit sky. The older missionary looks on in silence and love, remembering her own first year. There she meets with God and fights the battle with self and wins. The second year is shorter than the first, the third shorter still, and the fourth—only three more to stay, then two, then one! Then

the time is counted by months, then weeks, then days, and the missionary thinks, "How can I ever leave these people?" And so, in later years, the missionary tells her friends that God does give the hundred-fold, even in this life. So one comes back to the home land for rest and study, leaving behind seven of the best years of her life and a great piece out of her heart. No other place, no other people, ever fill it quite full again!

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